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Qasim Hassan

1. Introduction

In the past, the rural areas in southeastern Iraq were typified by high population density with adherence to crop production and animal husbandry. The situation is different now: Changes in social, political, and environmental frameworks have extremely altered the characters of this area. Following serious changes related to water scarcity and droughts, the acceleration of the process of increased urbanization, and the corruption-induced failure of the implementation of development projects made the southeastern rural area look completely different to how it looked in the past.

For these reasons and due to the transition from the countryside to the city, some villages and hamlets in the southeastern *gilit* dialects area have been virtually depopulated. As a result, rural areas are nowadays characterized by an open space dominated by endless horizons of dry and hot steppes with almost treeless farmland where most villages are only sparsely populated.

However, the scattered population in the remote southeastern rural areas is still heavily guided by tradition. The inhabitants there live in small communities with just blood relatives, close friends, and maybe some acquaintances whom they know well. Such community life is particularly important because it reinforces the feeling of intimacy and prevails the spirit of cooperation among the southeastern rural inhabitants when times are hard. In addition, people there should even, as a general rule, never hide anything from each other, a fact which can be confirmed by the

further discussion of the widely-used conventionalized directional 'Where?' greetings in this *gilit* dialects area.

2. Data Corpus

Due to a general lack of enough linguistic sources on the southeastern *gilit* dialects of Iraq, I had serious problems in establishing a significant theoretical data corpus during the course of this study. However, the corpus I am analyzing in the present paper has been collected from various sources. I was first of all concerned with the most recent frameworks on the issue of greeting behaviors, particularly with Duranti (1997: 21-23) and Enfield & Comrie (2015: 267-269), among others. Duranti (1997: 21), for instance, claims that 'Where?' greetings can be used as “an attempt to sanction the reciprocal recognition of one another's presence with some specific requests of information that may or may not receive a satisfactory response.”

The data I gathered on the southeastern *gilit* dialects confirm Duranti's conclusions, and they offer at the same time an evidence against Searl's (1976: 12) and Norrick's (1978: 279) expressive account of greetings. Information on the usage of 'Where?' greeting and its variants in the southeastern dialects area has been mainly collected by spending plenty of time in talking to selected rural inhabitants as well as in observing and paper-pencil-interviewing people in public gatherings.

3. 'Where?' greetings: Features and uses

Based on self-gathered examples, I would like to discuss in what follows some specific features and uses of the 'Where?' greetings in the southeastern *gilit* dialects area. It has been observed during the course of this study that directionality is the most important feature of these social greetings. That is, it is an essential condition for choosing a certain variant of 'Where?' greetings to recognize the direction of the moving party. When the greeted person is going outside the rural area, a 'Where are you going?' is then used for greeting. The following is an example.¹

1)

wēn	rāyih
WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.
'Where are you going?'	

In contrast, when this person is seen while coming inside the rural area, a 'Where are you coming?' is then expected as a greeting.

2)

'mnēn	ǧāy
WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.

'Where are you coming?'

Often enough, 'Where?' greeting questions are used in conjunction with the hortative *hā* in a cautionary sense (3a & b), with an adverbial (4a & b), or with both (5a & b):

3a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>
INTR	WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.
'Where are you going?'		

3b)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.
'Where are you coming?'		

4a)

<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'Where are you going today?'		

4b)

<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'Where are you coming today?'		

5a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	where	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

5b)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

It is, however, unpredictable which party will initiate the greeting when two parties pass each other on a road, so that failure in exchanging a 'Where?' greeting is highly probable. The following is an example:

A:

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rā...?</i>
INTR	WHQ
'INTR Where ...?'		

B:

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rā...?</i>
INTR	WHQ
'INTR Where ...?'		

However, such a failure might be corrected by interrupting the greeting by, say, party (A) and repairing it by party (B) as shown in the following examples.

A:

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rā...?</i>
INTR	WHQ
'INTR Where ...?'		

B:

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	where	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

For reasons of simplicity, such conventionalized directional greetings can sometimes be reduced to just 'Where?' in conjunction with a haptic gesture such as hand raising or pointing in a particular direction, mostly the direction of the moving party. In addition, 'Where?' greetings are most commonly used at distance, hence they are restricted to outdoor contexts only, and they must therefore be performed loudly to bridge the spatial gap between both interlocutors. Saying these greetings loudly in public is a sign of having an open and frank life style, so that everyone in the neighborhood can clearly hear where the greeted person is going to or coming from.

4. Responses to 'Where?' greetings

It should first of all be noted that there are no definite, generally applicable, permanent responses to 'Where?' greetings in the southeastern dialects area. Based on this, responses to 'Where?' greetings vary according to mood and situation of the party greeted. For the most part, the initiator usually expects one of the following two responses. First, the person greeted may stop for a while to tell the other party the goal he is going to (6a & b), the place he is just coming from (7a & b), or the task he has to do/done (8a & b).

Greeting Question (Where are you going?)

6a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

Possible Response

6b)

<i>rāyih</i>	<i>li-l-sūg</i>
go:PRS.2SG.M.	PREP-DET-market
'I am going to the market.'	

Greeting Question (Where are you coming?)

7a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
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INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

Possible Response

7 b)

<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>il-sūg</i>
come:PRS.2SG.M.	PREP	DET-market
'I am coming from the market?'		

'Where?' greeting (Telling the task)

8a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

Possible Response

8b)

<i>čīnit</i>	<i>asǧī</i>	<i>il-gā'</i>
be: PST.1SG.	irrigate:PRS.2SG.M.	DET-earth
'I was irrigating to the field.'		

In contrast to the aforementioned possible responses, the second response option to these directional greetings can be uninformative and noncommittal. During the study period, recordings of people talks and face-to-face interviewing have shown that some responses to 'Where?' greetings can be insignificant and unclear. That is, when the asked party does not wish to disclose any aspects of his private life, he might be satisfied with a pointing in the direction he is going to or coming from, without saying a single word. In the following examples, the person greeted satisfies in answering the 'Where?' greeting in (10a & 11a) with the demonstrative particle *hič* in (10b & 11b).

10a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

10b)

hič.
DEMO
'That way.'

11a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

11b)

hič.
DEMO
'That way.'

In addition, depending on the mental state and mood of the party greeted, responses to 'Where?' greetings might be offending, a case which may invite countermeasures. Accordingly, one might hear uninformative, aggressive responses such as the following:

12a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

12b)

<i>rāyih</i>	<i>li-l-ḥara</i>
--------------	------------------

go:PRS.2SG.M.	PREP-DET-shit
'I am going to the shit. '	

13a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

13b)

<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>il-ḥara</i>
come:PRS.2SG.M.	PREP.	DET-shit
'I am coming from the shit. '		

Such instances of uninformative, noncommittal responses are typically restricted to ordinary people of the same social class, so that it is strictly prohibited to use them when speaking to influential people such as tribal leaders, righteous or even elderly people. Doing so will be deemed abusive or insulting, and it can far too quickly turn into antipathy, which does not infrequently lead to a discontinuation of the contact between the families of the parties involved, or it might result in a fine.

5. Possible Leave-takings for 'Where?' greetings

After a 'Where?' greeting, the interlocutors take leave using a variety of context-dependent expressions and physical gestures such as kisses, hugs, hand raising, hand shaking and the like. With the exception of some situations like those in examples (12a & b) and (13a & b), one might use, among other things, the standard leave-taking formulae in examples (14a, b, c & d) and (15a, b, c & d).

Greeting Question (Where are you going?)

14a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>wēn</i>	<i>rāyih</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	go:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you going today?'			

Possible Response

14b)

<i>rāyih</i>	<i>asǧī</i>	<i>il-gā'</i>
go:PRS.1SG.M	irrigate:PRS.1SG.M.	DET-earth
'I am going to irrigate the field.'		

Possible Leave-taking expression

14c)

Greeting Question (Where are you coming?)

15a)

<i>hā</i>	<i>'mnēn</i>	<i>ǧāy</i>	<i>il-yūm</i>
INTR	WHQ	come:PRS.2SG.M.	ADV.
'INTR Where are you coming today?'			

Possible Response

15b)

<i>činit</i>	<i>asǧī</i>	<i>il-gā'</i>
be: PST.1SG.	irrigate:PRS.2SG.M.	DET-earth
'I was irrigating to the field.'		

Possible Leave-taking expression

15c)

<i>ānī</i>	<i>atwakal</i>	<i>hassa</i>
1SG.	go:PRS.1SG.M.	ADV.

'I go now. '			
	<i>hā</i>	<i>ḥōš</i>	
	INTR	good	
'INTR good. '			

Specifically mentionable is that leave-taking formulae are frequently accompanied by other pleasantries such as *maqḍiya* (all the best), *biltawfiq* (I wish you success), among others. Note too that 'Where?' greetings can occur in groups of more than two peoples and they are also permissible with the opposite sex, excluding body contacts such as kisses, hugs, hand-shakes and the like.

6. Conclusion

This paper dealt with the interesting sociopragmatic topic of 'Where?' greetings in the southeastern gilit dialects area which has so far not been discussed in cross-dialectal studies. It has been shown that 'Where?' greetings present an indispensable mean of social communication for the southern rural population to interact and to share common issues usually at distance. The paper has, moreover, discussed some most common features of 'Where?' greetings such as directionality, noncommittality, unformativity, as well as the possible responses and Leave-takings for these greetings.

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NOTES

1. The transliteration system of Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (1961) will be employed throughout this paper.

ABSTRACTS

Many studies have shown that in some cultures questions like 'Where are you going?' and 'Where are you coming?', or even 'Where are you?' do not necessary demonstrate that the initiator is really interested to know where the other party is actually going to, coming from, or where he is, but they are simply types of conventionalized directional greetings amongst people in some language communities (Firth 1972, Keenan 1976, Gregor 1977, Bach & Harnish 1979, Hoem 1993, Duranti 1997, Enfield & Comrie 2015; to name but a few). In the southeastern *gilit* dialects area of Iraq, however, 'Where are you?' and related greetings ('Where?' greetings, henceforth) are deeply rooted and remained strong throughout the years, although with some signs of softness due to the partly urbanization of these dialect communities, among other reasons. The aim of this study is to identify for the first time some of the key features and uses of the greeting questions in the southeastern *gilit* dialects area of Iraq. The data on which this study is based come from the author's daily observations of his own speech community as well as from recorded conversations with inhabitants in the remote southeastern rural areas.

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Keywords: southeastern Iraq, *gilit* dialects, greetings, directional greetings, Leave-taking.

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